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SUBJECT: CAMEROON ELECTIONS ON JULY 22; NUTS, BOLTS, AND
USG OBSERVATION

REF: A. YAOUNDE 894

1B. YAOUNDE 865

1C. YAOUNDE 741

11. (U) Summary. Cameroonian will go to the polls on Sunday, July 22 to elect their representatives to the National Assembly (Parliament) and to municipal councils nationwide (reflets). Post will field 11 observer teams across all ten provinces, many working in coordination with other diplomatic missions. In a July 18 meeting with donor country representatives, National Election Observatory (NEO) Vice President Diane Acha-Morfaw told Charge that this year's elections will be markedly improved, in large part thanks to a United Nations-supported computerization of the electoral rolls. End Summary.

Parliamentary Elections

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12. (U) Forty-five political parties will field a total of 1,302 candidates for the 180 seats in Parliament. The 180 seats are divided among 85 constituencies. In single-seat constituencies, the "first pass the post" system obtains, meaning that voters cast a vote for an individual candidate and the candidate who wins a plurality of the votes cast wins the seat. In multi-seat constituencies, voters cast a vote for a party that has presented a slate of candidates for the constituency. Winning parties are awarded seats based on the proportion of the vote they receive. The multi-seat constituencies offer the best statistical chance for the smaller parties to win a seat, if they win a substantial proportion of the votes cast and no party wins an outright majority.

Municipal Elections

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13. (U) In the municipal elections, 33 parties will field 26,608 candidates for seats on the 360 municipal councils across the country, each of which has between 25 and 61 councillors. The councillors, once elected, will choose one from among them to be the mayor of the municipality. Many larger cities (Yaounde, Douala, Kumba, Bamenda, etc) are divided into smaller municipal districts (Yaounde has eight), each with its own council and mayor. City councils control the funds distributed from the central government for local projects and the resources obtained through municipal taxes.

How to Vote

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¶4. (U) The mechanics of voting in Cameroon are largely inherited from the French system. On election day, the voter visits the polling station, usually located in a school, and presents his voter card to the commission managing the election at that station. The commission is composed of an official delegate from the central government and representatives from the political parties contesting the election in that constituency. A representative from the National Election Observatory (NEO, or in the more common, French acronym, ONEL) is present in every polling station. The voter's name is checked against the list of voters for that particular polling station. No more than 500 voters are assigned to each polling station.

¶5. (U) Once the voter's status has been verified by the commission, the voter's thumb is marked with indelible ink, and the voter picks up the ballot papers. In the Cameroonian (and French) system, each candidate or party is assigned its own ballot. The voter collects ballot papers for all candidates and proceeds to the voting booth (often no more than a curtain). Inside the booth, the voter deposits the ballot of his choice in the ballot box and discards the unused ballots into a trash can provided for this purpose. The voter is not allowed to leave the polling place with unused ballot papers. In the case of this year's election, voters will go through the voting process twice in each polling place, once each for the parliamentary and municipal elections. In previous years' elections, this ballot system has been manipulated. A CPDM (ruling party) activist wishing to suppress votes for the opposition SDF candidate, for example, can offer money to voters in exchange for the SDF candidate's ballot paper, thereby ensuring that voters will not place the SDF ballot paper in the ballot box.

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Observations

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¶6. (U) The US Mission will field 11 observation teams, each comprising one or two Americans, a Cameroonian locally engaged embassy staff member, and an embassy driver, spread across all ten provinces. We coordinated our effort with diplomatic missions from the UK, Canada, the Netherlands, and Spain. The French Embassy will send representatives into the field, but insists that their participation does not rise to the level of "observation." The EU Commission has received instructions from Brussels that no EU officials are permitted to participate in observation activities. The Germans had originally planned for 13 observers, but called off their participation less than one week from the election, on orders from Berlin. We are not aware of any international observers (official or NGO) traveling to Cameroon for this election.

¶7. (U) Press reports indicate there will be about 5,000 accredited observers of the elections, of which fewer than 100 will be diplomatic. The largest observation effort is led by the Catholic Church, which will field an estimated 1,600 observers through its National Commission for Justice and Peace. The National Human Rights Commission will fund 300 observers.

Comment

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¶8. (SBU) In a July 18 meeting with representatives of the US, British and Canadian embassies, ONEL Vice President Diane Acha-Moraw told Charge that this year's elections will be markedly improved over previous efforts, in large part thanks to a United Nations-supported computerization of the electoral rolls. The apparent easy wins to improve the management of elections in Cameroon (switch to a single ballot system, simplify the voter registration process) are so glaring that often they overshadow the marked improvements

that have already been made. As we noted before (reftels), we do not harbor any illusions that the July 22 elections will be above reproach, but we expect they will represent meaningful gains over previous elections. End comment.

NELSON